

# Open Access at the Nordic Council of Ministers

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## Nordic Cool

Nordic Cool. So the Americans called their largest manifestation of international culture this year. In Washington DC the Kennedy Center had curated a Nordic arts and culture festival. At their own initiative and with their own money, however also with financial support from the Nordic Council of Ministers as well as directly from the Nordic countries. During five intensive weeks the festival displayed more than 700 performances and exhibitions. In this huge building which every night was shrouded in beautiful Northern light. The attention was enormous. Never before has a Nordic event created such a medial effect – more than 70 million people was the medial reach. The impact in the USA was significant. And not only did the Americans get to know about Nordic art but through seminars and the presence of Nordic ministers they also got to know about key Nordic values and the Nordic Welfare Model.

Emphasizing this international Nordic focus the Economist published this [special report](#) in February 2013. And when president Obama visited Sweden in September 2013 he was particularly interested in the Nordic Model. Recently World Economic Forum invited our Secretary General as keynote at a large conference on regional cooperation. These are examples of a general trend these days. People look towards our region and generally like what they see. And think that Nordic is cool and exciting. However, if you ask within the Nordic countries you often get the impression that, yes, people think Nordic cooperation is good and should be sustained BUT it is somewhat *altmodisch* – perhaps a bit too folkloristic. Why is that so? It's hard to say, but looking from within often gives you another perspective and globalization of course also implies that people are more focused on tendencies abroad.

## **The Nordic Council of Ministers and the Nordic region**

In this somewhat contrasting context the Nordic Council of Ministers is operating as an instrument for intergovernmental cooperation between the Nordic countries. Our goal is to facilitate and manage the cooperation but also to constantly identify new areas where the countries can benefit from cooperation and in general our goal is to promote the region internally and externally.

We are a region of only 25 million people. Yet, our economies combined would make us the 10<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world. However, our mission as Council is not to form a union or to act independently of the countries. Our mission is to support the cooperation. To do this we have a yearly budget of around 1 billion Danish Kroner. With this money we finance institutions and offices, research institutes and short term programmes, and more than thirty permanent working committees. Each year around 500 projects are being initiated. Very often the projects commission researchers to deliver analyses that we later publish. That is what my publishing unit takes care of – or some of it. Because, many of the books and reports are also published by our institutions and programme partners or elsewhere in contexts I am not aware of.

This is clearly not an optimal situation from an organizational point of view. Our ambition to support and promote Nordic cooperation is not well achieved when we even can't collect all the information that we publish in one spot. You may say that this is not crucial publishing digitally. Google will find it anyway.

But as you all know there are billions of pages on the web and if you're not on the first result page no one will find you. That's why we spend much time optimizing and adding value to our content in order to make it discoverable.

Discoverability is a prime goal and one important key to achieve that is really good metadata. To ensure good metadata we need to set guidelines and make sure these are complied with in a common infrastructure. This infrastructure should be open and interoperable. Therefore, our aim is to gather all publications financed and published by the Council in a common repository based on Open Access.

Now, the cooperation dates back to 1952 and clearly the organization reflects that in many ways – for better and for worse. Many things are working well but there is a need for modernization. Luckily, our new Secretary General has been given the mandate to modernize. Therefore we are now in the process of revisiting the organization in order to modernize and rationalize it where it makes sense. This ambition fits very well with my publishing ambition: to build an Open Access repository framed with an Open Access policy that includes all our different entities in the organization. So, modernization through adopting to open access technology and rationalization through cooperation across the organization.

## **Nordeana – a Nordic Open Access repository**

We have set up an Open Access project aimed at delivering this: a common repository and a policy. The project group is led by me in the secretariat and includes seven of our institutions. More are to join later on.

Obviously we did not want to reinvent already available technology but we were looking for somebody who could tailor the repository technology to meet our needs and manage the repository for us. We don't have and we don't want to have the skills to do this. Those skills are very often found in the library sector and since we were also looking for a long term sustainable solution, we looked towards the Nordic university library sector.

We invited eight players in the field for a bid. And I have to tell you: it was an excellent experience. I was overwhelmed by the presentations, the attitude and enthusiasm to take on this assignment. It was a bit like talking to private companies – just better of course!

It was difficult to choose among these very good bids. But after an intense evaluation process we chose the DiVA consortium steered by Uppsala University Library.

We are now in the process of setting up our instance in DiVA. When we actually have all our publications in DiVA with a common standard for metadata, we will not only benefit from the distribution mechanisms of the repository but also from increased use of each others publications. This will help us to increase discoverability. Our repository is due to open in February next year named Nordeana – which means writings of and about the Nordic region.

## **Open Access policies in the process**

So, that's our repository – our coming infrastructure. We are also working on an Open Access policy. When starting to do so our primary question obviously was: Why should we have a policy? Well – not surprisingly – we need an overall policy to frame our publishing activities. A policy to which we can attach guidelines that specify our requirements when publishing. For instance the kind of metadata that we require for publications in Nordeana, accessibility requirements, graphic requirements and so on.

But we also need a policy for all the research publications that we finance through our projects – publications that are not being published by us. So answering our initial "why" also made it clear to us that we really are looking at two policies.

In this respect we differ from most public funders since we also act as publishers. And we differ from most publishers because we also heavily fund externally published research.

Other differences include our point of departure. We are formulating a policy on behalf of the Nordic Council of Ministers. On the one hand we are “just” an international organization but on the other hand an organization that serves the intergovernmental collaboration between the Nordic countries. This means that we place ourselves somewhere between acting freely and acting according to the will of the countries. Now, as I said in the beginning we are not a sixth country. Yet we still have a certain amount of “free will” or perhaps more precisely the right to initiate actions that we believe will benefit the Nordic region. Sustaining that balance is also a challenge in our policy making process.

Another issue is to balance our policy against existing policies. All the Nordic countries have some kind of Open Access policies for public funded research. The EU has its policy. ScienceEurope launched a statement earlier this year. And so did even the G8 research ministers. Then there’s the Wellcome Trust and the Finch recommendations for the UK government. There are other IGOs like the World Bank and UNESCO. The list is long.

We have to balance between these policies and statements and consider where and how we fit in. That’s a challenge, too. At the same time we can of course prosper from sharing experiences with other policy makers. In fact we have already done this as part of our project through workshops and meetings. This has shown very beneficial and we plan to do more of this.

And last but not least we have to balance our policy against the reality of the researchers. All though we in principle can mandate whatever we want when we fund the research it would never be in our interest to do this in a way that obstruct the work of researchers. However, at the same time we should not abandon our ambition to ensure Open Access. And finally we are often only funding the research projects partly. Again we need to be in a dialogue with the research community to balance the strength and the wording of our mandate. We are currently undertaking some pilots to obtain experience here.

There are other key stakeholders in the Open Access debate that we have to understand as well. Publishers obviously is one group. But a truly diverse group. From the very large, very commercial to the smaller not-for-profit publishers. Coming from a scholarly publishing background myself I am quite aware of this stakeholder group but we have not yet entered into negotiations with any publishers so far.

So, there are many considerations to take into account, and that is partly why we don’t want to kick off with one big policy covering it all. Instead we will begin with a policy that deals with our own publications however mentioning that a more comprehensive policy is planned.

That endeavor is not even straight forward. Among the institutions and the secretariat in the project group there are different viewpoints. In a way this first process is kind of a micro cosmos for the next step. And you may say, that if we can't agree internally, then the chances for agreeing at a larger scale seems quite impossible. However, despite the different opinions I am optimistic. We currently plan to launch our policy together with the repository in February next year.

## Conclusions

It seems that the policymaking is a long bumpy road. However true that may be it is equally true that you have to think openly about all the different stakeholders and engage with them. You have to anchor the policy making process and communicate what you are doing firmly among your stakeholders. Otherwise you risk that the compliance with and hence the effect of the final policy will be poor. So ongoing stakeholder dialogue is vital. And in this process I think it is very helpful to focus on the different challenges that the different stakeholders face and see how you can solve their problems. To solve problems is the best way to become successful. It's easy said but hard to do. But at least you can start by listening with an open mind.

I want to end this talk by reminding you that we are only dealing with Open Access to publications. Data most certainly will get into our focus at some point. But following the recommendations of Alma Swan (and others) it would not be wise to include Open Data in a policy for publications.

And however important Open Data policies are I do still think that we have to remember that Open Access to publications is still to be achieved. Only somewhere around 20-30% of the published scholarly literature is immediate Open Access. I am aware of the debate about these figures but in any case the numbers are still low – 10 years after the Berlin Declaration. And here we are not even talking about scholarly monographs!

Anyway, we are on the right track and not many question the direction anymore. It is no longer a question of Open Access or not. It is a question of how and how fast.

Our Nordeana repository will be an infrastructural tool for our policies. It will highlight our focus on policy implementation and hopefully help it. Filling the repository with Nordic literature might also turn it into an exciting source for anyone who has an interest in the Nordic region. And as I began this talk: the interest is there and it's international. So let's move while we're still cool.

Thank you!